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Today, Mexican-Americans total five million throughout the southwest from Texas to California. They belong to a distinct culture which lived in the southwest territory before its cession to Mexico.

The Mexican-American has been forced by his own will and the pressures of society to live in an unwanted part of the community. His educational experience has often excluded his own culture and background, yet he has remained a foreigner. The educational philosophy governing the Mexican-American is not, but should be, equipped to guide the youth in a bi-cultural life. This may be done by establishing in educational objectives a smoother and more stable process of diffusion and assimilation and by recognizing the function of culture in personality growth.

No intelligent answers to these difficult problems have come forth. Very few programs have been undertaken to help alleviate Mexican-American problems, and the only method seen now is the constructive process of long-range study and planning. At present, it is apparent that educational institutions do not function properly under the strain of a bi-cultural community. In the future attempts must be made to incorporate the two cultures within the school curriculum.

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WANTED: A New Educational Philosophy for the Mexican-American

Marcos de Leon

WANTED A New Educational Philosophy for the Mexican-American

The question with which we are to confront ourselves has long been a vital one. It has to do with the education and progress of nearly five million individuals of Mexican-American descent throughout the Southwest.

It would be well to clarify the hyphenated term "Mexican-American" as herein to include an ethnic as well as a national concept describing the Spanish speaking group of Mexican ancestry. This obviates the problem as to when his parents arrived in this country or where he may live.

There are those who raise the academic question, especially in New Mexico, of denying belonging to this ethnic group. Fortunately, history cannot be denied or changed by wishful thinking of wanting to be different. What difference does it make if a group migrated to this country some thirty years ago or included as an integral social unit in the territory ceded to the United States by Mexico at the Treaty of Guadalupe in 1848? The people and culture found in what is now the Southwest were but an extension at this particular period of the Mexican Nation.

Therefore, for all practical educational purposes, and if we are to think in terms of this ethnical and national concept, the Mexican-American is a well-defined social group whose ethos and cultural pattern differs very little from Texas to California.

Shunted, however, into ghettos of his own making or forced to live in the unwanted part of the total community, and "Jim Crowed" to this particular area by restrictions of one kind or another, this homogeneity of culture has suffered to the point of partial disintegration:

(1) affecting the normal functioning of group living, noticeable in the breakdown of mores, family life and language; and (2) interfering drastically with every effort on his part toward adjustment in American Society.

Across these many years we have been bent on educating the Mexican-American under the assumption that it would lead toward complete and normal participation in community life. The Educational Policies Commission[1] in "The Purposes of Education in American Democracy" defines at length the functions of the school and leaves very little doubt as to its objectives.

However, these purposes of education can never be implemented as the total function of the school in any given community unless the needs of that particular community are taken into consideration; as well as the needs of all individuals, as determined by age, abilities, interests, socio-economic status, and ethnic cultural background. These factors are all contributors to the construction of curricula as community resources.

Today the Mexican-American is faced with three areas of influence which demand of him continual adjustment: (1) the community to which he has been relegated and in which he has surrounded himself with those ancestral cultural elements rendering optimum security; (2) the total community which in spite of himself will not accept him as a bona fide citizen with all of its attributes; and (3) the school, equipped with the objectives indicated, has completely ignored that his life is molded by the stark reality of living in two worlds: a cultural dichotomy not touched or tapped by the actual methods in curricula construction.

1. Educational Policies Commission, The Purpose of Education in American Democracy (Washington, D.C., National Education Association and the American Association of School Administration, 1938.)

One premise is certain, we can no longer accept the usual procedures of constructing the schools educational program, teaching methods, and evaluation techniques applicable to the English-speaking student as a valid educational approach with the Mexican-American without considering: (1) the bicultural community in which he lives; (2) the lack of his complete and total acceptability by "American" society; (3) the consequent isolation and segregation, thereby producing unassimilated social units; (4) the socio-economic status peculiar to this unacceptability; and, (5) the inherent cultural lag brought on by barriers which prohibits normal participation in community living and thereby affecting maximum personality growth.

The impact of these conditions has rendered the Mexican-American impotent in many areas of life, creating confusion in his thinking as to the role he is to play on the American scene.

Efforts to identify himself with the representative culture have been attempted in various degrees, depending on the social level of the person and the community in which he resides. Yet, in spite of all, he still remains a foreigner, a stranger, and for all intents and purposes "a Mexican" with the complete common stereotyped connotations brought on by some one hundred years of cultural conflict.

Moreover, the partial disintegration of the parent culture and the fact he has been taught through social pressure to be ashamed and even to disown his ethnical ancestry, has made the Mexican-American a victim of confusion, frustration, and insecurity.

A very practical teaching of mental hygiene is that one cannot run away from himself, or what he is, or from that in which he believes.

To do so is to invite disaster. Somewhere along the way, the Mexican-American must make a stand and recognize the fact that if there is to be progress against those barriers which prevent and obstruct a more functional citizenship, he must above all things retrieve his dignity and worth as a person with a specific ethnical antecedent, possessing a positive contribution to civilization. No man can find a true expression for living, or much less think right, who is ashamed of himself or his people.

Without deviating too much, one has to give due recognition to the progress of the Negro and the Japanese-American in the professions, vocations, and community leadership. While the two are not comparable with the case of the Mexican-American in the true sense of the word, still there are similarities to merit comparison, especially where ethnic and socio-economic acceptability are concerned.

It can be said without generalizing too much that whatever progress in education and community consciousness has been achieved can be attributed to (1) becoming realistically aware of their non-acceptance by American society; (2) finding personal dignity and worth in their ethnical and cultural background (this especially where it concerns the Japanese-American); and (3) sacrificing immediate ethnical integration and assimilation by excelling in education and the professions, and thereby making as a group a more intelligent contribution to American democracy.

The salient portion of the thought expressed herein is one toward which educational thought and practice and community organization should be directed in an effort to create conditions which contribute to the security and well being of its members. Where two basic

cultures such as the English and Spanish have come to throw circles of influence over one another, the method whereby this takes place and its relation to the growth of youngsters should be a matter of concern for administrators and teachers.

It is, therefore, strongly recommended that educational philosophy, theory, and practice in order to be better equipped to guide and direct Mexican-American youth and fulfill the complex needs arising from a bicultural life, should: (1) incorporate intelligently the sociological processes of acculturation, diffusion and assimilation; (2) embrace a functional theory of culture and its relation to the growth of human personality; and (3) establish within the existing educational objectives a positive corollary by means of which the Mexican-American's social integration and cultural assimilation in American society can be made a smoother and a far more stable process.

A dire need is voiced by concerned and interested persons in the area of education and social structure for studies in the dynamics of acculturation, diffusion, and assimilation. It would seem appropriate at this point to indicate that very little is actually known as to: (1) what constitutes these processes; (2) how these processes take place socially and psychologically in the lives of youngsters living within two cultural areas; (3) how these processes aid or contribute to the formation of the inner and outward structure of human personality; and (4) how such a person adjusts to a maximum to the demands of the two cultures thus permitting greater social mobility, participation, and acceptance.

The complexity of the problem is somewhat clarified by Herskovitz[2] with the definition of acculturation: "Acculturation", he says, "comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with a subsequent change in the original cultural pattern of either of both groups."

Herskovitz expresses the anthropoligical concept of cultural areas which could be limited to two, A and B, having existence in time and space, possessing specific dynamic traits and characteristics, although not to be segregated from the fact that any particular trait is passed on by social contact. Those social phenomena or evolving changes of either or both of these two cultures, A and B, resulting from close and continuous contact, he terms acculturation. Acculturation, therefore, as defined, permits a two way process of cultural exchange and influence, permeating and molding every phase of man's social life. Such an uninhibited relationship between two cultures could be directed with definite goals and objectives, or left to chance.

Throughout the Southwest, elements of the cultures peculiar to the United States and Mexico have thrown out constant and continuous circles of influence over one another for over a century. In every hamlet, village, town and city this rubbing of elbows of the two cultures, involving food, art, music, religion, architecture, clothing, language, ideas and attitudes, is actually occurring, albeit undirected, but serving the only purpose that culture was meant to fulfill: adjustment and security to its members.

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2. Melville J. Herskovitz, Acculturation (New York: J.J. Augustin, Publisher, 1938), p. 10.

Those cultural traits representative of the Mexican area found in the curricula of the school are varied and sporadic, depending on the interest of the administrator and teaching personnel, as well as the experience and preparation of the latter: (1) Spanish is offered in some school systems at every possible level of instruction or included as an academic requirement, or not at all; (2) social studies units and courses in art, music, and home economics touch upon some of these elements in keeping with the conditions expressed above.

By and large, however, school administrators have failed utterly to implement the educational implications of the acculturation process as a principle from which a more dynamic and functional curricula could be constructed.

The process by definition implies a concomitant influence on the personality of the Mexican-American since by premise of the educational problem he lives in a bicultural community. Therefore, if we are to utilize the community and its needs to formulate the school's program, elements of food, art, clothing, music, language and history, peculiar to the Mexican area, forcibly should be included in the curricula of those schools serving large numbers of Mexican-Americans. This above and beyond those requirements cited by the Policies Commission.

In scrutiny of the average school program, one finds without failure those cultural elements peculiar to the American scene composing principally the curricula, utilizing them to their fullest extent as the complete resource. This seemingly unimportant fact not only violates the best recommended procedures and methods for setting up

specific objectives and thereby the construction of the curricula for a given community, but prohibits and circumvents the school from assuming its complete role and function as an educational institution for the community.

This traditional approach expressing an authoritarian concept leaves very little leeway for anything but a frustrating and sometimes sterile learning situation.

No one as yet has given answers to the following imponderables which everyone of us in the educational area, conscious of them or not, confront: (1) What should be the aim in view, the objectives and goals of the educational process for the Mexican-American; (2) what constitutes and comprises his cultural-environmental needs; (3) what influences does the interplay of all the cultural elements which surround him have upon the formation of his personality; (4) how can the school make the learning situation a more profitable and functional process when knowledge as to needs and causes of behavior patterns is entirely lacking; and (5) how can the school best evaluate this experience for diagnostic, remedial, and placement purposes with measuring devices which have been standarized on an entirely different cultural group?

Literature on the subject is virtually not to be found. Actually at the present moment, the neglect in the field of research which should concern itself with these problems is so overwhelming that it is endangering the area of educational service.

Any attempt, therefore, to clarify the doubt surrounding any or all of these important fields would have to be undertaken through experimental or "pilot" studies covering the status of each and practical recommendations should be forthcoming on the basis of the findings.

The above are expressed herewith in a more specific form: (1) What should be the rationale for an educational philosophy adequate to meet the needs of the Mexican-American; (2) what makes up or comprises the needs of any Mexican-American community where an educational program is to be effected, together with the needs of all individuals, including ages, abilities, interests, and socio-economic status; (3) what is the acculturation process, and what part does its dynamics play in the growth of human personality; (4) how can the school provide a more adequate program based on the dynamics of acculturation and the needs of the community; (5) what methods and techniques are necessary to make the learning process more meaningful and functional for a youngster adjusting to the demands of two cultures; (6) how can measuring devices be constructed and standardized adequately reliable to measure the Mexican-American's learning experience for diagnostic, remedial, and placement purposes; (7) how teacher training institutions can prepare personnel for this area, including teachers for all levels of instruction, administrators, and people for student personnel services?

The factor of establishing a principle under which the community school concept and all its implications could function is one actually derived from the sociological history of this country.

In the past, the process of acculturation together with community planning apparently was left unguided and without direction. The ideology that the United States is the "melting pot" of the world does not necessarily hold true. The frustration and insecurity brought on by a "melting process" carried on at random and conditioned by cultural conflicts, are too much the integral parts of reality to permit this "catch as catch can" philosophy to reign over and control the life of

the Mexican-American any longer.

The plea throughout this paper has been for constructive long-range study and planning. The school can no longer function as an isolated unit, or continue to carry on practices based on tradition; formulate its program, or much less fill its role as an educational institution for the bicultural community, under the present "all or none" concept as an educational philosphy.

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An abridged synopsis of this report in the Journal of Secondary Education November, 1959.

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